

of conversation this month in meetings with the Syrian opposition delegation and top U.S. officials."

The problem, U.S. counter-terrorism and intelligence officials tell *The Daily Beast*, is that there are just so many jihadists with Western passports traveling to fight in Syria that they worry some of them may slip back into the United States without being detected.

"The NSA does not have the ability to track thousands of bad guys—and on the human intelligence side, this is even more difficult," another senior U.S. intelligence official told *The Daily Beast*. "So we are worried that people are slipping through the cracks."

Olsen in his March testimony said there were thousands of foreign fighters in Syria and that hundreds of those fighters held Western passports.

"This raises our concern that radicalized individuals with extremist contacts and battlefield experience could return to their home countries to commit violence on their own initiative or participate in al Qaeda-directed plots aimed at Western targets outside of Syria," he said. Olsen also said that a group of "al Qaeda veterans" from Afghanistan and Pakistan have gone to Syria, making the prospect of recruiting new members for the organization even more likely.

Aaron Zelin, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy who closely tracks the flow of foreign fighters into Syria, said, "In the past when we've seen Americans go abroad to fight in foreign countries and a number of individuals have been trained to go back to attempt attacks on the homeland." The best example he said is Faisal al-Shahzad, the Pakistani American who traveled to Taliban training camps in Pakistan and then attempted to set off a bomb in Times Square in 2010. Al-Shahzad failed to properly detonate his bomb and was reported to the New York police by a Muslim-American street vendor.

"It's not just Americans who are going to Syria, but there are up to 3,000 European citizens from countries that have visa waivers with the United States who have also joined the jihad in Syria," Zelin said. "This is why so many Western counter-terrorism officials are so worried, it's much easier to get into our country with a Western passport."

Those Americans that have gone off to fight in Syria also do not fit the typical terrorist profile. Last May, the *Detroit Free Press* reported that Nicole Lynn Mansfield, a convert to Islam, was killed in fighting in Syria fighting Assad. In April of 2013, a federal court charged Eric Harroun, a former U.S. Army private, with firing a rocket-propelled grenade while fighting alongside al-Nusra, al Qaeda's official affiliate in Syria. If U.S. intelligence estimates are correct, these cases could be unfortunate harbingers of things to come.

Mr. MCCAIN. Madam President, I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

VETERANS HEALTH CARE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, this weekend Americans will gather to remember all who have fought and perished so that we might live in freedom. Memorial Day is our chance to honor their extraordinary sacrifices.

Of course, Kentucky has long played a proud and vital role in the defense of our Nation. I am honored to represent so many Kentuckians in the Armed Forces, including those stationed at Fort Knox, Fort Campbell, the Blue Grass Army Depot, and members of the Reserves and Kentucky National Guard.

One of the reasons Memorial Day is so important to me is because it allows Americans to reflect and give thanks for all that we have—to recognize that none of it would have been possible without so many Americans we have never met putting everything on the line for us. That is why the men and women who protect us deserve our full support when they are deployed, when they are training, and when they return home. Most Americans certainly agree with that statement.

Yet as we have recently learned, that is not what is happening. So many Americans now turn on the evening news just to be sickened by the steady drip, drip from the Obama administration's growing veterans scandal. The denial of care to our veterans is a national disgrace and the scandal only seems to increase in scope by the day.

We first heard about 1 hospital in Phoenix, then we heard about 10 medical centers across the Nation, now there are at least 2 dozen VA facilities under investigation. It all leads to an obvious question: How widespread is this failure to treat our veterans?

We need answers from the President and his administration. The White House claims the President didn't even know about the latest scandal until hearing about it on the news, even though a top official testified he knew of inappropriate scheduling practices at VA health care clinics as far back as 2010. It sure raises a lot of questions.

It is a curious thing. President Obama, the most powerful man in the free world, always seems to be the last to know about what is going on in his own administration. From the Obama administration's IRS scandal to its ObamaCare Web site fiasco, just about every time, the President claims to be in the dark until the wrongdoing surfaces on its own—usually in the press. The pattern is incredibly worrying.

If it is true he learns so much through the press—if he knows that little about what is going on in his own administration—then I recommend he get reengaged. Right now. Right now. Because American Presidential leadership is needed today. This scandal appears to be a failure of huge magnitude, and the people we represent are demanding he rise to the challenge.

Our veterans are counting on him to work with both parties to get to the truth and to pursue solutions that can make things better—solutions such as the VA reform bill that passed the House yesterday with strong bipartisan support. That legislation, which I have cosponsored and which Senator RUBIO has been the leader on, would make it easier to remove high-level VA employ-

ees for performance failures. It is a smart idea. There is no reason for us not to pass it quickly right here in the Senate. The President should call for its passage right away too. That would be one positive step forward for him—a small one, but a positive one, even though, for some reason, the White House has been ambivalent about the bill.

Look, we all remember how engaged the President was when healthcare.gov flopped. He was very engaged. He didn't just send a staffer out to Phoenix; he didn't just give a secretary a stern talking to; he didn't say he wouldn't stand for it. He pulled out all the stops. He made it his No. 1 priority to get that Web site running, even if that is still not done. What I am saying is the President should put more effort into helping our veterans than his attempt to fix a Web site. Only he can work with us to get to the truth. Our veterans deserve it. They deserve answers. They deserve accountability, and they deserve solutions.

As we look ahead to Memorial Day, I hope the President will work constructively with us to give them just that—to prove how grateful we are to the brave men and women who protect us every single day.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

BARRON NOMINATION

Mr. MARKEY. Madam President, I rise today to speak in favor of the confirmation of David Barron to the First Circuit Court of Appeals.

As a Harvard Law professor, he has broad bipartisan support from those who know him best—his colleagues. Larry Tribe and Charles Fried—two professors at Harvard who could not be further apart politically—both agree—and this is the joint quote—"Barron is a brilliant lawyer who will make an excellent judge. What is clear to us is that Barron will decide cases based solely on the relevant sources of legal authority, including binding precedent, and that his political views would in no way distort his legal judgment."

This is the kind of unequivocal support we want for a judicial nominee, and David Barron is just the kind of judge we should confirm.

I stand alongside those of my colleagues who believe transparency is paramount and that we need a public debate on drone policy. Indeed, I support a robust debate on our entire drone policy, not simply the use of a drone to kill an American citizen who was plotting the annihilation of his fellow Americans.

Importantly, the White House just announced that it will release to the general public the key memo Professor Barron wrote, so all Americans will be able to take part in this debate.

But let us be clear: David Barron is not responsible for the administration's delay in releasing the memos he

and others in the Office of Legal Counsel were directed to produce. He is certainly not responsible for the administration's drone policy or the decision to authorize an attack. He is a lawyer who was asked to do legal analysis for his client, the President of the United States.

Entangling David Barron's nomination with the policy of drone deployment is unfair to him and unfair to the people of Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Puerto Rico who need the vacancy on the First Circuit filled by someone as qualified as David Barron.

I believe David Barron will be an excellent judge, and that is why he has my support.

WRRDA CONFERENCE REPORT

Mr. MARKEY. Madam President, I commend the Senate on taking final action on the Water Resources Reform and Development Act, known as WRRDA. Today's bill includes the \$310 million Boston Harbor dredging project which will deepen Boston Harbor's main navigation channels.

Boston Harbor is an economic anchor for the entire New England region, and this investment will help ensure its future as a port of world class distinction. Improving the harbor to accommodate more and larger ships will bring more jobs, more investments, and more economic activity to the harbor, extending Boston's position as a shining city upon a hill as well as on the shore.

Dredging the harbor will double the number of containers on ships coming into Boston. The project will also allow the port to accommodate ships being built to serve the expanded Panama Canal, which is planned to open next year.

The Army Corps projects that for every dollar spent on construction, there will be \$9 returned in increased economic activity, resulting in a \$2.7 billion economic benefit for the entire New England region.

I thank Chairman BOXER and Ranking Member VITTER for their hard work getting this bill over the finish line. I also thank Senator WARREN and Congressman CAPUANO, Congressman LYNCH, and the entire Massachusetts congressional delegation for their leadership and commitment in securing this vital funding.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada.

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask the courtesy of the Senator from Nevada to do a brief unanimous consent request.

Mr. HELLER. Madam President, that is fine with me.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—H.R. 3080

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that following the

vote on H.R. 3080, the WRRDA legislation, the Senate proceed to the consideration of Executive Calendar No. 638, the Frank nomination, and vote on confirmation thereof; further, that there be 2 minutes for debate prior to the vote, equally divided in the usual form; further, that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, with no intervening action of debate; that no further motions be in order to the nomination; that any statements related to the nomination be printed in the RECORD; that President Obama be immediately notified of the Senate's action and the Senate resume legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. Madam President, with this agreement, at 1:45 p.m., there could be as many as three rolcall votes; however, we expect only two rolcall votes.

I appreciate again the courtesy of my friend from Nevada.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada.

VETERANS HEALTH CARE

Mr. HELLER. Madam President, on Monday, May 26, our Nation will pause to remember all those who paid the ultimate price while serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. It is a solemn day on which we recognize these brave heroes for their valor, their courage, and their commitment to our country.

As we honor and remember those who died fighting for our freedom, Congress must also remember we still have a promise to fulfill to the veterans who thankfully returned home—many with visible and invisible wounds of war. Our Nation has a proud history of caring for its wounded and disabled servicemembers and their families.

When these men and women volunteered their service, the United States guaranteed they would be cared for. As a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, I believe that promise has not been kept.

It is no secret the Department of Veterans Affairs is facing a significant challenge with accountability at all levels of their agency. This failure of responsibility has an impact on the hundreds of thousands of veterans in my home State of Nevada.

Last month I was honored to have a number of veterans join me for a roundtable in Las Vegas. This was an opportunity for me to listen and hear their concerns. By far, nearly every veteran in attendance expressed frustrations with the VA's claims backlog and the health care they are receiving. These veterans told me they feel discouraged and hopeless, that the VA does not and will not keep its promise.

They told me about the negative impact delays in benefits and care have on veterans and their families. Such comments should come as no surprise

given the difficulties Nevada veterans are facing. Look no further than the problem of the claims backlog here in Nevada.

Although the Secretary of the VA promised there would be changes to address this problem, Nevada veterans are still waiting the longest in the Nation—up to 352 days on average—for their disability benefits claims to be processed. This is nearly three times the VA's deadline of 125 days to complete a claim.

These issues in Nevada and the allegations raised across the country are causing veterans to lose faith in the VA, and I have raised all these concerns to the Secretary in a letter I sent 2 weeks ago. I asked for immediate answers about the lack of accountability on the local level and whether VA leadership finally plans to do something about it. Although I requested a response by Wednesday, May 21, the VA still has not responded. What these problems ultimately amount to is a lack of accountability in the VA leadership.

When I questioned the Secretary at a Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing last week, he agreed he was ultimately responsible for the problems with VA care and health benefits. Despite this admission and admitting that veterans are not receiving the care they were promised, he said he does not plan to resign. So my question is: If the Secretary does not plan to resign, who is held accountable in the VA?

The VA has been given enough chances to change and do better, but these were empty promises that have not produced any results. It is now up to Members of Congress to take action. That is why I have already taken a number of steps to exert oversight, demand transparency, and develop solutions to the problems facing the VA.

During last week's hearing I asked the Secretary for assurances that the audits being conducted by the VA at its medical facilities would include all of Nevada's hospitals and clinics and the results would be shared with me and the rest of our delegation. As promised by the Secretary, I look forward to receiving these results as soon as possible, and I expect substantive immediate action should Nevada have any reports of mistreatment or delayed care of veterans.

I also visited again with Las Vegas hospital officials last Friday to ensure veterans at this facility are receiving the care they have earned and that the facility is properly handling its appointment waiting times.

It is critical that the Las Vegas VA hospital constantly work to improve its services and follows recommendations from the VA inspector general so that patients do not endure long waits—like the blind female VA veteran who waited for 5 hours before being seen in the emergency room.

I believe the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee should continue to exert